

Lesley Battler | **Journal** | 1987



Journal archive project

Introduction

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

Vol. 7, 1987

Power struggles – Uncertain futures in Montréal – So many McJobs – Death of my father – On the day of the funeral I learn that a book of my short stories will be published by NuAge Editions – Return to Montréal after funeral – Editing and preparing the book – Nomadic communities – Friends leaving Montréal – New job at McLennan Library at McGill University – Passover seder – Sukkot – Sexual politics – Festival of Political Art – Just for Laughs – Holography – Publication of *the Polar Bear Express* – Surprise party – Book launch – I start part-time graduate studies – Labour issues and power struggles – Inlaws – Detroit.

Jan. 7

Vivid dream, like a scene from a Beineix movie. In the dream Fred was reading and I was lying beside him with my head on his shoulder, dreaming I was dying and there was a huge crescent moon in a rich royal-blue sky. Outlines of gabled, peaked European buildings. I felt diminished, life force becoming weaker by the second. Similar to falling asleep only more decisive. The moon was waxing, larger and larger, and (in the dream) I was describing everything to Fred in a little trancelike voice. I kept repeating, "The sun is flesh, the moon is dying. Sun is flesh, moon is dying." Dream-Fred was alarmed and kept trying to hush me because he couldn't stand hearing me being so uncanny. When I woke up, I discovered he hadn't heard a peep, none of those trance words had pierced the dream barrier.

**

Fred, who now works at the Ski Instructor's Alliance as an editor and desk-top publisher, was sent to Banff to work with the directors who are based in Alberta. He and his boss, Nicole O'Gallagher, are staying at the Banff Springs Hotel. Part of me is excited for him, part of me is envious.

Jan. 15

Dad died about 5:00 this afternoon in hospital. He was to go down to Toronto for his check-up on Monday. Apparently he had a heart attack and was in a tremendous amount of pain. It does seem as if his physical body has brought him nothing but pain and suffering. I'm glad he has been released from this pain and from so many oppressing things in his life. But I'm feeling a bit bereft.

Managed to contact Fred in Banff. Spent the night alone in the apartment. Mary Rose called and talked to me for three and a half hours. Kayla called and then Ya'acov. Fred had called them from Banff. Ya'acov offered to send a taxi over to get me so I could spend the night there. I said I preferred to stay in my own familiar bed, wrapped in blankets. They put their telephone by their bedside so if I changed my mind all I had to do was call them I could. Bless their hearts. The last thing I felt like doing, though, was coming out of my burrow.

**

Horrible shock walking into the funeral parlour and glimpsing my father laid out in the casket, dressed in the suit he wore at my wedding. I thought that two second look would kill me. He looked like a wax figure – *it was not him*. Neither Cutler nor I could go in there to look. We were the only two who stayed in the reception room while the others filed by the casket. After the “viewing,” Fred drove my mother around town to do legal stuff.

Jan. 19

Funeral. All postal workers and old Barrie people, friends of my parents. The posties looked faded and grey, like people lined up in Eastern bloc countries. They were nice and some, like Ernie Bond, were genuinely emotional. This is all I can stand to write now.

**

At my parents' house, Sally called from Montréal to give me her condolences. She was trying to get in touch with me and finally traced me through Ya'acov at Astral. The Editing/Publishing class she is taking wants to publish a book of my “Crissy stories.” I wished my father could have heard that news. He would have been proud. As soon as I got off the phone I burst into tears. My mother was sympathetic and Nancy understood perfectly. Something cruel and ghoulish about this timing. The one person who would actually care about this is gone.

Jan. 22

Back in Montréal. Everything seems strange. Trying to get back into activities. Went with Sally and Grant, Michèle, Cathy, David and Fred to a Concordia reading for the launching of Nu-Age Editions, which is the publishing company arising from Gary Geddes's class. Can't say I enjoyed myself. David said it best: it was a cliché, a smattering of cliques, in-group bigwigs, a pastel setting of pink flamingoes and Miami Vice without the vice.

Someone reprimanded Cathy and me because we talked throughout some poet's tiresome "fuck-poems." The evening tried to combine literature and party and neither worked. Later Sally told us that two people have taken over the entire publishing venture and won't listen to anyone else's ideas. Our downstairs neighbour Lise Gagnon was at the gala. Seems she is a friend of Karen Haughian, who is the head of the committee working on my book. Cathy and I finally let off steam by shouting "Abdul!" at the top of the stairs.

Feb. 2

Susan Usher dropped by to pick up a new story for the collection called "Terra Incognita." She arrived during a power brown-out. Lights were on, eerie and dim, not out completely but not giving any light. I couldn't see her features, only a big overcoat and bushy hair. Sense of messages given and received, midnight deliveries. An air of mystery to the transaction. I really hope they'll go for this story because I don't have any more Crissy stories and I just don't want to write any more of them. Enough Crissy already. Fingers crossed that this last piece will give me my page requirement.

Feb. 4

Visited Johanne McCreath (Cunliffe). She looks terrific. Her apartment is beautiful. It was great seeing her. In fact, it felt as if I just walked in, sat on the couch and we began a talk which did not even pause until Andy and his brother came in from a hockey game. Actually, the evening reminded me of conversations with Sharon. Johanne and I talked about choices, marriage, children, etc. She is ambivalent about having children for the same reasons I am and it was good to compare notes.

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**

Deena invited me to a potluck at her place. It was being held for Lois Rodden. I was delighted and flattered by the invitation, but when I got there I found the same clique of people who generally ignore me. Talked to André, Lise Simard and Lois Rodden. Axel Harvey was there. He has interesting opinions and ideas but I always feel uncomfortable around him. I can never think of anything to say to him. But we do now have one big thing in common, we are both passionate about building up a resource library.

Met Annie Wilson. At first I was attracted to her warmth, enthusiasm and social graces. After awhile it seemed as if I was attracted to yet another person interested only in themselves. Astrology interests her only as far as it applies to her own chart. Mary Rose talks a lot about herself and her chart too, but she is also generous with others. Annie Wilson talked incessantly about how much she loves Southern California and hates it here. Apparently she's only here because education is cheaper. I also found her talk about the "Latin temperament" and "French fuck-it-all attitude" completely offensive.

**

Went to the all-day workshop about career points in the chart, but it was already well-covered material and I didn't learn anything new. I also don't agree with the high prices of these lectures. It shuts out the (apparently few) among us who don't have much money. When I consider that writers read for nothing and in even dingier rooms, I think astrologers whine a lot. That said, it was wonderful to see Susan. I think I've just answered my own question as to why I go to these lectures. She enfolded me in a great big beautiful hug as she had heard the news about my father from Deena. I almost started crying. She went through the same thing in 1982 when her father died and knows exactly how I feel about visiting Barrie. Susan also saved me from having lunch alone with Axel Harvey. He asked me to go for lunch with him, which gobsmecked me. I roped Susan into coming with us. The two of them talked and I felt rescued. After we went our separate ways, Axel Harvey bought me a double espresso, which he passed to me through the ranks at the lecture.

Feb. 8

Huge snowstorm. Went to Cathy's house to help her move into her first apartment. I have only ever seen her house in snowstorms and it always makes me think of a fairytale gingerbread cottage. All her possessions were packed up in the living room. No one was around when we arrived and she looked forlorn. Eventually her father ambled out of his study, dressed like a priest with a huge cross around his neck. I always thought Lutherans would be stark and plain, like the Nazarene Church I went to, but they've kept a lot of ritual and vestment. They also, apparently, smoke and get divorced. Seems a bit like the Church of England.

Finally met Vicky, Cathy's step-mother. She is young and I can understand why she is so threatened by Cathy. Vicky had a paralyzed or terrified expression, and told us she worried so much over preparations for Sunday that she had "Saturday Night insomnia" and had to go have a nap. The nap, I guess, went on all afternoon for we didn't see or hear her again. Cathy told me that when Vicky and her father are fighting it's hell around the household, but wonderful when they make up. It is a topsy-turvy household. Cathy's father seemed to be feeling forlorn as well, for he occasionally wandered out of his study talking to Fred about his Subaru. We packed up the Subaru. In the meantime, the storm continued and Cathy, David and I entered a frontier world, heading to a new place by wagon train.

Feb. 13

Last day at FBDB. Such a pleasant day I almost forgot how tedious and unreal this job really was, and how much I really do not ever want to specialize in acquisitions. I never even got to look at the books! Went for lunch at an Italian restaurant. Conversation with Julia McIntosh and David about the possibility of taking an MLIS at McGill. They both think it's a good idea. After cleaning my desk I stayed behind talking to David, Maria and Nick. David walks with a slight hunch and tends to tilt when he stands. His eyes are a clear blue, his face smooth yet he gets these furtive almost diabolical expressions on his face. He almost looks like a baby who has a Molotov cocktail concealed in his rattle. David is thinking of doing an MA at Concordia, part-time like me. The thought of doing practical courses at night to aid career development doesn't appeal to him any more than it does to me. I really liked working with him and will miss his dry wit.

From work I went to Ya'acov's parents' house in St-Laurent to spend an entire Shabbos with the family. Fred and Ya'acov went to shul and I helped Kayla take a bath (!). She is very pregnant and it was fascinating to see her lying in water, her stomach and breasts big and swollen. Her nipples are huge and brown now and I could see a purple network of veins. Kayla gave me one of her robes and a beaded cap for my hair and I felt transformed. I'm fascinated by all this minutiae. I've lived such a boring, sheltered life that I am really easy to surprise and astonish. It makes me think of that refrain in Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* - "as for we who love to be astonished." I do think that capacity may be one of my best qualities. You can't stay bored or depressed for too long if you're as easily amazed as I am.

Ya'acov and Fred came back with two guys from shul, Steven and Jonathan for the Friday night dinner. This dinner was sumptuous. Quite an uproar as Y, Steven and Jonathan decided what tune to sing and they all sang at different times and pitches - maybe even different tunes. No wonder it's so noisy at shul. Steven is a psychology major at Concordia. We had a good talk about schizophrenia and split personalities. Jonathan expressed disgust over some of the hard-line right-wing reactionaries in Israel. A group of high school students came to the house and we played Risk and Game of Nations until late into the night.

Saturday, coldest day of the year thus far. We walked the mile or so to shul. At first Fred and I stayed downstairs where a brawl almost erupted between an older man and a teenager. All the high school kids who were at the Bauers' last night were present. Ya'acov looked very impressive and authoritarian in his prayer shawl. He occasionally banged his seat to shush the kids, but it was a lost cause. Kayla took me upstairs where it was much more formal. The cantor was leading prayers. We met up with a young woman who steered me through all the passages so I said kaddish for my father. It loses a lot of its majesty in English but it still felt really good. A release, coming right from the bowels. So rooted deep in the body and so very powerful. It made me feel that the dead are truly mourned but somehow still with us, joining their voices with those of the mourners, a dialogue between living and dead. The power of that made me shiver.

Feb. 25

Nu Age committee meeting. Relieved to see Sally and Susan Usher as Karen Haughian intimidates me. She has an MA in English (in Composition?!) and teaches it part-time, which may explain her eagle-eye for grammar and sentence structure. I feel she is often too conservative but she is thorough and she explains things very carefully. She is also driven and came into the program with a straight A average. High achiever, type-A personality. She puts an enormous amount of pressure on herself and gets headaches. She takes things to heart. She lives in St-Henri and I admire her street-smart savvy style.

We did some preliminary editing at Howard Johnson's, where everything was (appropriately) child-sized, except for the waitress who seemed to tower above us. They (Karen) are making me change Crissy's last name – and for a typically weird creative writing workshop reason. “Smith” apparently cannot be used in fiction without certain connotations attached to it. I really don't understand this, but okay.

**

Met Sue Usher in the English office and we went through all the stories together.

**

Another meeting, this time with Sue and Karen, to hammer out all the snags and changes. I know some things Sue was okay with won't get past Karen. We started off at the Stanley Pub, which is sleazy, just like the Plaza in Kingston. A couple of old men behind us became too distracting with their four-letter vocabulary and we moved to a nondescript pizza place. While we were working, Terry Byrnes, Clark Blaise and Scott Lawrence sat down right behind us. That proved to be distracting for a while. Some of the changes seem gratuitous and annoying but most are good. Sue and Karen are sharp and perceptive and care about the author's intentions and tone. I'm impressed by the close attention both pay to every word. Sometimes I wonder if there's any end to the flaws.

**

Met with Karen to look at ideas she has for the cover. They're planning to have it embossed, with the image of a polar bear in a midway ride. The title will be, *the Polar Bear Express*, after one of the stories in the collection. I remembered Toni Scholefield (Eric's fiancée) does graphic art. She wants to quit her job and go out on her own. Fred and I called her, she was excited about the project and sent a really good design. I hope it wins. It would be nice if the cover was done by someone getting their first start as an independent designer.

March 4

Nu Age contract signed in CASE office. I'm finally feeling both excited and fulfilled, instead of lumbering around with a millstone around my neck. Something that started with Colin's class has come to fruition. Something about that seems so right – I only wish it could have been different work. The people working in the office were almost as excited as I was, great feeling of camaraderie.

**

Read a piece in *The Selected Writings by Charles Olson* about syntax and tense that I wish I had thought of and/or been able to express to Karen, instead of wittering feebly about writers breaking grammar rules and creating amazing innovative work. I doubt if she would listen to Charles Olson either, though.

“Which brings us up, immediately, bang, against tenses, in fact against syntax, in fact against grammar generally, that is, as we have inherited it. Do not tenses, must they not also be kicked around anew, in order that time, that other governing absolute, may be kept, as must the space-tensions of a poem, immediate, contemporary to the acting-on-you of the poem?

“I would argue that here, too, the *law of the line*, which projective verse creates, must be hewn to, obeyed, and that the conventions which logic has forced on syntax must be broken open as quietly, as must the too set feet of the old line -” (21)

“ ... a projective poet will, down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs.” (26)

**

Mary Mason from McLennan Library at McGill called. Interview on Monday at noon. I have wanted to work at a university library since I began the Seneca program.

March 7

Met Cathy and David after work. We went to Swenson’s for ice cream and then to Cathy’s apartment. We stayed until two am talking about prejudice. David grew up in the Townships and was prejudiced against because he’s part French. He often finds himself torn in the middle between French and English sides. Sally and Mary Rose are both stubborn and resistant to French language and culture. I’ve seen Mary Rose look frightened and cornered when questioned in the gentlest way about it. This is probably the quality I dislike most in her. Sally and Cathy both work in the Carlton card store (right beside the Astral Photo store where Fred still works part-time), and they both talk about how rude francophones are to them because they speak English. Talking with David reminded me why Bill 101 was both inevitable and necessary. None of these anglophones are ever going to change if left to themselves. They are either too fearful, too entrenched or both at once. Those first few years of the Bill were a blood-letting, a cleansing process.

Cathy talked about being German and the guilt she feels about the world. Like me, she was the only one in her high school history class who took Québec's side on the independence issue. She voted for the PQ in the last election.

**

Interview with Mary Mason. Very British. Also very nice and scatter-brained. The interview was not high pressure. I flubbed the French portion of the interview. Mary's French was very easy to understand and I shouldn't have had any problem with it, but I get tongue-tied in English when I'm nervous.

March 14

Spent the day with Susan Kelly, helping her work on "Directions." I typed in the "Across Canada" updates, and we both mocked Marguerite Day, who mentioned a snow storm in Ottawa eight times in her column. She even had a passage (which Susan edited out) about "Sol's rays." Marguerite Day makes Isabella Valancy Crawford seem minimalist. I love being in Susan's apartment. It's fascinating with its eclectic juxtaposition of books – she has almost as many as I do – "Sylvia" collections in her bathroom. I love the bamboo she has installed all around her bathtub. We talked about everything; romance novels, porn, writing, the atrocious writing she gets for "Directions," ASM/FCA politics, weird astrology people. She has a sharp sense of satire and is very perceptive about people. I value her remarks in passing about my chart more than anyone else's.

**

Mary Mason called. I got the McLennan Library job. I begin work on Monday.

**

Lila and I went to a lecture-slide show on post-modernism. After the lecture we went to Van Houtte's for café au lait and we ended up talking about Israel. Lila is always stimulating company; keen, questioning mind, sly, sardonic humour. Subversive skeptical streak. One of her poems has been accepted by a New Brunswick journal. She told me she often feels out of place taking classes with so many young people. Sometimes I wonder if I'm trying too hard to ignore our age difference when we're together. Am I doing the wrong thing? Should I acknowledge it, but how do you do that without being ridiculous or embarrassing? I do know it bothers her. She is intensely interested in *Polar Bear*.

March 21

Carolyn Springer invited us to her birthday party. She has left Ville Marie Social Services and has started her own counselling service, using astrology and other esoteric techniques and therapies. She is empathetic and Piscean but also pragmatic and full of common sense. Robert Phillion and Mary Rose were there. Robert was funny, whimsical, expansive. We had a good long talk about work. The party divided between the astrology contingent and Carolyn's social work friends. We came together when one of her friends remarked that our conversation was "Vancouverish." I need to go there. I've heard so much about it and everyone seems to love it. Mary Rose in a contentious mood. She really likes to argue and can certainly hold her own. Tomorrow she'll argue for the very same thing she was so passionately against tonight.

April 5

Meeting at *the Link* office with Karen and Susan Usher. The typesetting looks wonderful – like a real book! The cover, though. They just went ahead and selected a cover without telling me about it. I had submitted Toni's design and thought she might have a chance. Talked for a while with Karen, our first personal talk. She is a driven woman, but vulnerable.

She is from Saskatchewan and entered the MA program with a straight A average. She is fascinated by Fred's desktop publishing job. Karen hopes to head back to Saskatchewan when she's finished with her commitments here. She insisted on an author photo and a brief bio of me. I brought in a photo Fred took, which I thought made me look rather Crissy-like. I showed it to Susan Usher first and she loved it. Neither Fred nor I expected Karen to approve but her reaction was unexpected. She liked the photo but objected because it was a full-length shot and you couldn't see the feet. I said that surely if people were really bothered by this, they could always imagine I have feet. I could always draw Fred Flintstone feet on the photo.

April 12

David Gosselin's confirmation into the Lutheran church (Cathy's church where her father is minister). This confirms my sense of David as being serious about morality and values. As for the church, I don't know it survives as it was the smallest congregation I've ever seen. Vicki was as nervous and insecure as ever. Carry-over from my Nazarene-Baptist days – I'm still surprised when I see ministers and their wives smoking. So many changes in Cathy's family. Her father hasn't been a minister for very long. This may be his first church. He used to work in the publishing field and his eyes lit up when he talked about it. I guess the divorce from Cathy's mother and marriage to Vicki occurred while he was still a publisher. He also used to be Roman Catholic and I know Cathy is still attached to Catholicism. A lot of changes in her life, both physical and ideological. I know she misses her mom and the relationship with Vicki is a constant strain. She is seeing a therapist through Concordia.

April 14

Passover seder at the Bauers' in St-Laurent. The whole gang was there, including Stephen, who seems to have been adopted by the family. The house is full of Mr Bauer's creations including a stained glass table. Many of the fixtures at Beth Ora were designed and constructed by him. The house was full of people, all centered in the kitchen. Wonderful food, Seder cups full of Mr Bauer's homemade wine.

The best part came when we were reciting the plagues and Ya'acov's sister Rita sent wind-up frogs, dinosaurs and lady-bugs down the table. When we came to the part about oppressors in the land of Egypt, she sent down a pair of Fred Flintstone feet! Stephen kept interrupting the proceedings to argue passionately over tiny points that he must argue about year after year. Fred and I didn't leave until two am.

**

Accompanied Sally to her Editing and Publishing class after an uncomfortable confrontation with Karen over the cover art for *Polar Bear*. I caused the encounter and Sally was drawn into it. While at David's confirmation I had griped to Sally about the cover, how I hadn't been consulted and now felt deceitful having to tell Toni the selection had been made days ago and she had never been in the running. Her work had been done for nothing. I was surprised at Sally's reaction. She was utterly indignant. I'm not sure if I've ever seen her like that before. Sally called Karen. Karen was hurt and lashed out at Sally. Sally called me and she was distraught, her voice shaking on the phone.

So I went to the class with Sally so we could talk to Karen together. When we arrived at the class Karen was calm, rational. She explained patiently and ironically that authors had no control over the artwork, that was a publisher's decision. She also said it was too late to change anything, the book was at the printer and perhaps I was having last-minute jitters. Sally and I conceded, both just glad we had all met and smoothed things over. I was most interested in why Karen was so emotional with Sally and so cool-headed and rational with me. Why the complete change? Personal chemistry again?

Sally and I went on to visit Cathy. David was there. Cathy was in bed and the apartment was a scene out of *Les enfants terribles*. Sally goes over there and cleans up, does the dishes, straightens up the disorder. Sometimes I envy them their closeness, but most of the time it's too close, claustrophobic, insular for me. Reminds me of Jim Mills - living under a glass bell.

April 21

Spent the night with Wheeze enroute to Barrie. Her spirits have improved since our last talk, but she is still trapped in her bizarre job. She felt badly about my father's death and about not hearing about it until now. Then she remarked about it being just as well she wasn't at the funeral with Sharon there. Will I ever find a friend who is actually interested in me? Not just a third-party go-between. Marsha is seeing a psychologist about her job paralysis but will not talk to the counsellor about her family – which is a serious problem. She is thinking of going to look after her grandfather in Lindsay. It might be good for her, a time off she needs – if she is seeing their relationship with real clarity. She has a pattern of idealizing a person then coming full circle and reviling that same person when reality sets in. She keeps travelling with people; Bill, John's father, Diane Keon, and her stories of these trips are always traumatic. Her excuse for not quitting her job is, "Smiths never quit." Good grief. She is a library technician not leader of a country during wartime. I think her inability to let go of her job is directly related to her inability to let go of her family and their opinion of her, their rejection of her and her values.

Swinging back and forth. After ranting about her family she turns around and says how much she wishes her mother would come and study at Queen's and how she longs for a relative to live in Kingston. Marsha said she found it surprising that I don't share the same sentiment. I love my freedom in Montréal and I can't think of anyone in my family I miss that much. The fact that she won't talk about her family with the psych sends up a huge red flag. She and her five siblings lived with abuse and authoritarianism and I think it's the deep tap-root of all her problems, including job issues.

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Barrie much the same as ever. Really miss my father. House seemed very empty without him. Swinging between compassion and frustration with my mother. I understand what she's going through, but she has completely revised history in a way I find weird but typical. I remember how miserable she made him, all her verbal abuse, how she denigrated his interests. She didn't share or participate in anything he did, and she had no understanding of him.

We talked a bit about him and their marriage and she said, "But it lasted. It was a successful marriage." That brought me back to some sort of reality. Yes, older people consider longevity (time served) to be the standard for a successful marriage. This is "normal." To me, they were both isolated. I do remember some good times and affection between the two of them. There was certainly a symbiosis. He always took her side against mine during any conflict. But it could never be a successful marriage for me. In fact, I never wanted to get married as that was the only model I had. She wasn't all to blame. He didn't understand her any more than she did him.

He couldn't do anything for her need for attention or the need she has to make everything personal. If something doesn't involve her personally she will change the story until she is at the centre of it. This does make one question reality. Am I remembering right, or is she actually right? Have I have just selected and emphasized the negative times?

No Professor, Sir J or Chris Hopwood. I saw Mr Beltz briefly at Eastview, barely long enough to tell him about the book. He said it made his day and that this was a first for the school. After that, Fred and I were at completely loose ends and just rattled around the house in Barrie until we left to visit Marsha and John in Kingston.

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We've been seeing more of John on the last few visits. I think that's a good sign. We did the town. Chez Piggy's for drinks. Murder-mystery play with Eileen and then to a film-noirish art deco bar near the waterfront. Eerie "Blue Velvet" setting with Venetian blind striping cast over people. Objects placed on pillars, very surreal, minimal, spotlighted from behind making them look like totems.

May 1

Sally's anniversary party. It's been a year since she escaped Gulfin (Qureshi) and wanted to re-enact the day exactly as it was, even the seating. Sally drowns in her life. She can't seem to step out and it makes it difficult for her to write all the stories she has in her head. She has thousands of stories, anecdotes, precisely remembered conversations in her head. We met for a few hours before everyone else, a good long talk over coffee at le Faubourg. We talked about our families. She told me all kinds of stories about her grandparents, aunts, background. Her grandfather was a Baptist preacher. She lives deep inside her own life and when the words come out they seem unformed, scrambled because they come from a deep personal place and haven't been practices. I think a lot of people misunderstand and underestimate her. All the externals, directions, tags are removed in her conversation as in her written stories. I wish there could be a way of developing that quality. Turn the confusion into ambiguity, the lack of external reality into an intentional sense of dissolution, no borders. Her memory is extremely retentive, much more so than mine, and she has a sharp ear for everyday conversations.

We found ourselves talking about our parents and childhood. I don't remember what triggered it. Her parents are divorced. Her father is schizophrenic and she went through her high school years hating him. When her mother remarried she was unhappy because her new stepfather took her mother from her. In the store, she was choosing a card for her father. She's trying to have compassion for him since he is alone in the world, is sick and a lot of what she said or did was under the influence of medication. Her mother/grandmother had the biggest influence on her life, and her men are, in some way, not physical, dissolute, blurred, gay. Gulfin is from an entirely different culture. She is still fascinated by artificial insemination and although she wants to be a mother, she has never pictured a father figure.

We went to visit Cathy in the card store. Her Captain Bligh of a boss left her alone and the computer jammed. We went next door, fetched Fred from Astral. He tinkered with the computer while Cathy wrote the bills by hand. There was a lineup of about twenty-five people. Sally and I made boxes and put the items in bags.

Sally and I talked about French and now I feel I understand her feelings better. She has no ability to learn it and she's too embarrassed to try. Cathy doesn't care what she sounds like but Sally does. She is also too embarrassed to take courses and we pondered the feasibility of hiring a private tutor and splitting the cost three ways; Sally, Cathy and me. Michèle, David, Fred and Cathy arrived. We went to MacDoherty's then back to Sally's new apartment on Tupper. We told each other stories. Michèle told a romantic French story. Cathy told a long convoluted story she made up. She is always making up stories and telling them to David.

Michèle says she is moving back to her parents' house in Lorraine and switching to U de M for journalism. I hope journalism doesn't ruin her writing. She says that because she is not aggressive, people will talk to her and she finds out more than the pushy ones. She also says she has been surrounded by too many English people. Even at her work, the Bay, the people she deals with are English.

May 15

Boot and her latest, Rob, arrived at about 2 am, beginning a five-day visit. He is by far the nicest of her partners. He lavishes her with all the courteous attentive gestures she likes so much. Rob is conservative, solid, not my type at all, so when Fred wasn't around I was truly a third wheel. All his attention was on Boot, which was a good thing as I can't think of anything to say to him. But his presence wasn't as oppressive as I feared. Montréal isn't his world but he was a lot more easy-going than I feared. He's observant and points out little details. Fred took us on a long cruise around the island and Rob made a lot of sharp observations about houses, decorations, real estate, cars, etc – the types of things middleaged property-owners always comment on. Rob is actually younger than Boot, but his steady eyes and interests make him see much older. But he took the edge off the usual strain with Boot. When he liked something he said so. Everybody likes to be thanked, receive feedback.

Fred went to photograph a wedding with Ya'acov. Boot, Rob and I went to Old Montréal. I love going there, and while shuffling around with them I kept remembering the magic night Val and I had sat on the curb listening for hours to a street musician. This time there was no spark, and the three of us were just glommed together. I couldn't even escape for a coffee by myself. When I became aware they were not interested in artists, musicians, artisan shops, architecture, history, taking pictures, I settled into a torpor until I suggested having dinner at the Keg. That went very well, as did the rest of the visit.

May 28

Met Johanne McCreath at Marco's and Pepe's. Found out she is serious enough about having a baby to quit birth control. She says she's giving Montréal another year before she pressures Andy into moving back to Toronto. She seems lonely, depressed at not having worked for a year and basically doesn't know what she's doing with her life. She thinks she'll have a baby while she's here in Montréal so that by the time she returns to Toronto she'll be able to work again. Great talk about visitors and their reactions to Montréal. We have the exact same itineraries for visitors. I understand her discontent and feelings of rootlessness. Yet she is fair. She listens and is curious about what goes on around her. She took an intensive French course for 5 months. We also kvetched about weird self-important people in libraries, the rampant "good little girl" syndrome that drives me up the wall at McGill.

June 5

Lunch with Lila. She looked cool and free in her cotton dress. We talked about writing. She asks me questions as if interviewing me. Friends like Lila and Johanne remind me that I have a brain. We went to the Festival of Political Art on St-Laurent. I had heard about this event at work through Francisco Uribe, who I work with in Interlibrary Loans. He was very excited about the event because he is cooking food for all the participants. The festival was held in the vacant lot beside the Alternative Bookstore, which Francisco had a hand in running before he got a permanent position at McGill.

Lila and I arrived early and the performers were starting late so we watched a video in the bookstore. It was called “No Means No” and shows how society is structured to sanction rape. I was most intrigued by images of medieval and Victorian women interspersed between modern women traumatized over the violence done to them. The juxtaposition of images was so striking and made me really think about it on a visceral level. Images of the Virgin Mary spliced with those of a consumptive woman with large, tragic eyes, flesh literally wasting away. The film made the point that rape will never cease as long as a woman who was raped by a masculine god and forced to carry his seed is revered in our society. There is no difference between what God did to Mary and how Zeus impregnated swans, etc.

When I think of the constant devaluation, poverty, violence that women are subjected to – and the way these women are treated by the medical establishment it creates a rage I can’t deal with. One of the reasons I’m not more political is because I simply can’t deal with the rage that is stirred up. I admire people like Andrea Jones so much, because she stands in the front lines but hasn’t forgotten how to listen to another viewpoint or how to care for someone on a personal level. Lila and I enjoyed the performances on the outdoor stage. I love her keen, sardonic sense of humour and curiosity. We heard the “garbage poet” beating garbage can drums exhorting Jean Doré to keep his legions of yuppies at bay. One singer, dressed all in black, sang about nuclear holocaust to a disco beat. The words “il fait mort” were not difficult to grasp.

We saw Hysterical Women, the show we came to see. They’re a splinter group of Theatre Shmeatre. They parodied the “Real Women” organization, and I’d love to know where they got the fibreglass aprons. They tossed dainty little white bread sandwiches to the audience. They also parodied Kotex ads, leaping and bounding on stage with giant pads strapped to them. “New Freedom! Designed by men in laboratories. For that almost-human contoured comfort.” Women are shocking just by bringing their womanhood out in public.

I recognized one of the performers – she works at Paragraphe bookstore. Funny. When the political speeches, the “garbage poet” et al were on stage, passersby would stop and laugh or smile at all the leftover ‘60s granolas who still think they can change the world. But when Hysterical Women came on, many of the same observers grew hostile, disapproving. With all the people sitting on the ground dressed in jeans, Indian cotton, loose skirts, sun beating down, it really did feel like the late 1960s and I was finally in the middle of it all.

Fred and I returned at night for the festival finale, vigil for the refugees. The crowd had completely changed. Now there were a lot of leather jackets, spiked hair, urban jungle shock uniforms. Became aware of broken glass everywhere, crumbling brick walls, a hot wind. An artist brought out his model, who was covered in gauze and bandages and laid on the ground, mute, cocooned. People stood for a minute’s silence and lit candles for the refugees. A man got on his hands and knees and planted weeds and twigs around the wrapped figure. Extremely effective.

**

FCA National Conference began. I went down after work to see if Lise Simard needed any help with the book room. She didn’t. People kept asking me why I was there so I left! Later at the opening ceremonies surrounded by intimidating cliques. Heard the Buz Myers lecture and disagreed with much of it. Donna Van Toen: conventional fluff. Marc Bériault: good talk on Black Moon. Mine is 29 degrees Pisces.

June 12

Fred called me at work during my morning Copy Service stint. Fred’s Uncle John was killed in a bicycle accident in Detroit. I told Valerie Mayman, who was warm and supportive. She made me a cup of tea and we talked in her office. I told her about Fred’s uncle, but also my father’s recent death and how difficult it is to visit Barrie any more. She understood because she had exactly the same feelings when her father died. A Gothic day of wind, rain, whiplash trees.

Visited Fred's mother and his Oma. Oma seems to have become more introspective and somber since I last saw her. Her accent has become thicker so I can barely understand her. This death has almost removed her desire to live. I had a glimpse into the dynamics between Oma and Fred's mother, Marria. Marria was on the phone with John's wife, Fred's Aunt Lynn, and as usual with Marria, an argument ensued. I heard Marria say, "Yes, I know Mother has support of Narda and the nieces and nephews but the son is everything. We're nothing." Wow. "Nothing.." Marria is handling (or not) the crisis in her typical way, obsessing over trivialities, to the point where you can't reach her or connect via even the most basic uniting emotions. The spiritual poverty and isolation of this woman is bottomless. For the first time, however, I wonder about Oma herself, and the elevation of her son over all others, the dynamics between mother and daughter. It also gives a big clue into the ambiguity and resentment Marria seems to feel toward her own sons.

Our original plan was to drive to Detroit with Fred's mother, Oma, and his brother Bob but we realized it would be a ten hour hell ride and we ponied up for a flight. Fred's cousin Carol picked us up at the airport. She seemed less self-centered than usual. Instead of monopolizing Fred's attention she seemed to be avoiding us. Fortunately, the only time she cornered us about religion was at the cemetery. I was not comfortable discussing this outnumbered by the hundreds of evangelical Christians at the funeral and the conversation died before it could begin.

Saw Fred's cousins Debbie and Mike. Mike was very emotional, Debbie cooler. Debbie is warm and humorous, but I also find her very sharp, a much quicker mind than Carol. People kept describing Debbie in a very sentimental way, as a "Christian homemaker," presumably the ultimate role for a woman in their religious society. Yet her mother (Aunt Lynn) and Carol make Debbie sound second-rate compared to Carol or Peter. Debbie doesn't have ambition, drive, etc, etc. It seems that sometimes you're not really supposed to be who you're supposed to be. Now that sentence sounded a bit like Gertrude Stein!

The funeral itself was more like a Billy Graham crusade than a funeral. Three men stood up the "share" their feelings about Fred's uncle, but all they really talked about was accepting Jesus and being saved. By the time it ended I half expected people to run to the front shouting, "I'm saved! I can walk again! Hallelujah!"

A lot of serious things said by Debbie, Mike and Aunt Lynn, too, about Uncle John, his health and their relationship just before his death but no one dared deal with it. Apparently, John the workaholic had given up all his work on the basement and garage and was spending more and more time out of the house riding his bicycle (which is how he died). He was killed the day before he was to officially announce his retirement at work. Carol has inherited the workaholic trait. She is driven to pursue her ideal, Christian medical work and counselling – and being a “superwoman,” in a very acquisitive American style.

Oma was sombre, visibly shaken at the visitation. She found the focus on Jesus in bad taste and had a fight with Carol about religion, and claimed that they were trying to force their beliefs on her. Apparently in the Netherlands, funeral customs are much the same as the customs I know about in Italy or Eastern Europe. They dress in full black and do not send flowers. They write long letters that talk about the deceased. The body in the coffin comes out on a conveyor belt. This last bit was told to me by Aunt Lynn in a burst of resentment against the domineering Van der Harsts.

Fred and I listened to both Oma and Aunt Lynn, although I must say I completely agreed with Oma about the evangelical dominance of the funeral. Oma was also hurt because she felt the flowers, the gaiety and denial of North American funerals was disrespectful and showed that people didn't care. For her part, Aunt Lynn aired old grievances about Oma and some interesting impressions of Marria. I have learned that I am not alone in my feelings and general bewilderment about her. Lynn expressed almost everything I had always kept to myself about Marria; her obsession with trivia, manipulation, condescending, dismissive attitude toward anything she doesn't understand – her sheer density. Lynn is interesting in the way she makes insightful observations in a superficial manner, juxtaposed with household hints, greetings, gossip. Fred and I were billeted with a very syrupy Christian couple.

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Kayla had her baby while we were in Detroit. They named him Gavriel Dov, which I think is lovely.

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Lunch with Cathy Gray. She is discouraged and talked about moving back to London (Ont) to open a card store with her mother. She has given up hope of ever being able to speak French. She loves Toronto because every other place she's lived in has been soured by bad memories. London was the scene of the divorce, and Montréal was where she was kicked out of the house because she and Vicky don't get along. Now I think Cathy has projected a lot of hope and idealism on her mother. As usual, Cathy told very fraught stories from her childhood. I remember Colin telling her that her stories hinted at powerful intense moments but never delved into them or delivered what they promised. Cathy had responded by telling him writing was too painful and intense for her.

On one of her last days before moving, she had opened a kitchen window. Vicky accused her of opening the window on purpose so that Vicky's cat would jump out and get hurt. Cathy said, "Fuck off." Vicky threw a can of peas at her and started screaming. Reverend Gray, who was upstairs working on his sermon, charged downstairs shouting, "This isn't supposed to be happening in a christian household." Vicky had looked daggers at him and said, "Well it is."

June 23

Fred and I went to Sally's to what I thought was a belated birthday party for Cathy. When I walked through the door Sally took a photo of me, and then I noticed Ian and Ellie from Astral. Then I saw Dave and Claire, Concordia friends Marie Gagne, Lucie Adams. Michèle, David, Grant, Sally, Cathy. I was very confused, especially over Dave and Claire's presence. Then I saw the chocolate cake Cathy had made with "Polar Bear Express" printed out with Smarties. Sandy had made a huge beautiful card containing everyone's signature. The party was a surprise book-launch for me. Fred had called every one of them and kept it hidden from me for weeks. The book still isn't back from printing but Fred couldn't wait any longer. He, Cathy and Sally had been planning this for weeks.

This is the first party anyone has ever thrown for me, and it was a Montréal version of “This Is Your Life.” Susan Desaulniers came and Lila called from New Brunswick. Susan Usher was supposed to come and bring proofs for everyone to see but she never showed. Marc LeMay did, though! Cathy and Sally went to Ottawa for the day and ran into him there. He came after everyone had left, looking elegant, graceful as ever. He said he was writing a roman à clef about Stephen Schettini and had lost all track of time. He wrote “all success and glory to you” in the card, which was such a Marc LeMayish thing to write. I was thrilled.

June 26

Went to the Ruben Blades concert, which started off this year’s Jazz Festival. Ran into my interlibrary loan co-worker, Francisco in the crowd. Although he was drunk and embracing everyone, he was still as precise and practical as he is at work, pointing out a Dutch festival listing to Fred and telling me about le Boulevard des rêves brisés. Streamers criss-crossed St-Denis, musicians lurked in every door and alleyway, everywhere the sound of saxophones. The music was brilliant. I was utterly immersed in the long pieces. Blades has an earthy sense of humour and he gave it everything he had. He and his band seemed just as immersed in making music as I was in listening to it. Blades has put some of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s writing to music; jungles of shadows, ghosts, the Moon. Some excerpts from a lyric sheet:

“Twilight (Clara Oscuro)
At Catarino’s store
food leaves an aftertaste much
like the one that remains after
a long sickness.
A wind coming from the sea spills
a small of the drowned
and of roses.

There, at Catarino's, people dream
while a green moon breaks
over the returning tide and the entire
town hides behind its premonitions,
and the Army's shadow.

At 11 pm they pick up the sidewalks
and everyone goes home to forget.

"Over the twilight, between life and
death
a smell of roses comes from the sea.
People are worried,
their feelings have turned backwards.
Although the radio is censored
everybody knows the reason; silver crabs
have stolen the moon and
refuse to give it back

"The town awaits in silence,
hoping that with the tide's return
the smell of roses
will arrive like yesterday.
Over the twilight
between life and death
a smell of roses comes
from the sea."

**

Sir J called, and then the Professor called. They had both decided (separately) it had been a while and that they wanted to call me. Janet and Ron are back in Barrie. It seems that she disappears every so often, usually after they move, re-emerges when she is ready. We talked and joked as if no time had passed, returning to our world of innocent jokes, pranks. At one point she said, “And what’s new with you, Lou? Probably a book that you haven’t told anyone about.”

**

Went to see a Mark Romanek movie, *Static*. It reminded me a lot of *True Stories*. Also like a T Coraghessan Boyle story come to life. Tiny strange figures lost in a huge barren American landscape. Every American cliché is parodied – the gun in the bag, the crackpot survivalist and his family (shades of Boyle), the evangelist and the juxtaposition of odd, kitschy objects. These characters live in Diane Arbus territory. Underneath the jokes and satire is a deep sadness, yearning, idealism that can make you cry, especially over the reason Ernie Blick created his invention to see heaven, and why only he can see it. The ending is tragic and very American; a bus full of people exploding on live TV.

A movie very much of the late 1980s, with artifacts plowed up from other decades, countries, cultures, stripped from context and bumping into each other. Like a lot of movies, many scenes are haunting and Arbus-like. The crucifixes on the wall with Jesus hanging upside down in foetal position washed in an eerie luminous blue. Amanda Plummer is wonderful; an ancient child. Her role is ambiguous. Did she say what she did about heaven to Blick to trigger the succession of incidents leading to the explosion, which released Blick so he could find his parents in heaven?

July 4

Received the sixty royalty copies of my book. Susan Usher delivered them. I’m not the first who received a copy, however. Linden Rogers in the grad office said she already had the book. Karen was right about the cover. It is wonderful.

**

Hot. Dead hot. My brain is broiled. Cathy held a surprise party, this time in honour of David Gosselin's birthday. She held a barbecue on the top of her apartment roof. Someone called the fire department and they literally crashed the party.

**

Pool party at Susan Desaulnier's in St-Lambert. Susan bought 4 books, for herself and friends. Susan is taking an intensive French course at Concordia and using the language whenever possible. So many of my older friends seem much more adventurous and courageous than people my age or younger. I found this in my Seneca program, and here now as well.

Cathy talked again about being a model. The desire to do this has become so strong she applied at an agency. She asked everyone what we thought, her good points, bad points, physical qualities that could help her get ahead. My knee-jerk reaction is always a feeling of disappointment in something I perceive to be such a low goal. I always want to shake her and tell her she can be so much more and her dreams should be bigger. But modelling is not ever something that was ever open to me, something that could never be a possibility and I don't have the right to judge friends who do have this choice. If I were in her or Michèle's positions, would I still be so "pure" and self-righteous, or would I be tempted to try that route? I went with it and told Cathy she could be very successful because she is a North American ideal; blond, healthy, wholesome, virtuous-looking. She climbed onto an inflatable killer whale and smiled, as if there were already a gaggle of photographers gathered around her. She then said she wanted to model swim wear so she could pose just like that and look beautiful. Michèle then admitted she has done runway modeling. Not surprising. Tall, slender, she can look graceful as a dancer and proud as a revolutionary. A strange, appraising, businesslike way of looking at people – friends. It made me feel quite uncomfortable.

We talked about sex. Cathy and David have talked about marriage. David backed off when Cathy started picking out silverware patterns. Now David is talking about marriage again and Cathy has lost interest. Sally serves Grant, the way she used to wait on Gulfin. I'm fascinated by the way she disappears into the role. She becomes invisible. We went shopping in St-Lambert, which is the type of town Cathy's alter ego would come from, with its upscale stores full of decorous objects. It reminds of the gentrified parts of Kingston. Cathy's apartment is full of photographs of herself, but the centrepiece is a card depicting a Victorian girl in a lace-collar dress, who looks uncannily like a young Cathy.

July 17

Comedians fascinate me, the way they take the insecurities and humiliations of ordinary life and turn it all into a routine. Moments are selected and timed like words and phrases in poetry. Also a blend of emotions, pain, anger, insecurity, envy mingled with humour. Saw a line-up of new comics at the festival "Just pour rire," but went specifically to see Judy Tenuta. People really are afraid of women who speak out – both men and women. I saw a drastic change in attitude at the Street Art festival, the defensive body language, puzzled frowns, etc. Here, it was the same with Judy Tenuta. The same people who roared over the Brighton Bottle Orchestra smiled nervously over Judy. She traipsed on stage like Blanche Dubois, playing an accordion and immediately smashing all the clichéd feminine ideals by calling herself in a scathing Brooklyn tone, "giver goddess, "petite flower."

"Come closer to the goddess," she hissed, her dimpled, big-eyed face sneering and scowling. She growled about going into a singles bar: "Yeah, there was this *man* ..." She was the one really dangerous comic in the whole line-up, the one who makes you laugh, cringe and feel released, all at the same time. What a complete reversal from all the conventional feminine model talk the other day!

**

Really big storm. Delightfully Gothic at McLennan Library today but by the time I left, the streets were rivers. Trees and telephone lines were down, Metro trains not running, commuters on Decarie abandoning their cars and swimming to shore. Now that it's over and the city has resettled back into place, it feels like a collective Jungian dream.

Aug. 1

Eric and Toni's wedding. The ceremony itself was held at city hall. The young female Justice of the Peace read out civic articles in a beautiful voice with a French accent- nicer than most ministers. The reception was held at their house in Dollard, where tables were set up in the back yard with a canopy overhead. A lovely set-up, undoubtedly conceived by Toni.

Aunt Lynn was there, which was lucky for me, since Fred was the official photographer. All their friends are baby-boomer yuppies. Eric and Toni's neighbours even have a framed photo of the Rolling Stones on their wall. I was very happy to have Lynn to talk to. We talked about a lot of personal, emotional topics with so little effort and in such a rational way. Carol has taken her father's death very hard. She was working in the terminal cancer ward when it happened, and found she had nothing inside with which to comfort others. To me, it would be more worrisome if you could continue giving, but Carol feels it's a failure or a shame on her part. I've seen this in Marsha.

Also continued talking about Fred's mother. Lynn doesn't understand Marria any better than I do. Marria is driving her crazy. Lynn speculated that deep inside Marria is very sensitive and she's built up this huge defense system through the years. It's almost impossible to deal with someone who is as obsessively superficial as Marria. Neither of us could think of anyone who is concerned with the trivial to the exclusion of everything else. She said Marria doesn't show any feeling, but I said that she does express anger, usually in the form of a harangue or an edict.

Anger seems to be the one emotions that comes through in very deeply blocked people. it seems to be the one channel that remains open, the only option left. It seems the anger itself isn't real because it's unconnected to any awareness or insight. That has been buried to the extent it becomes impossible to deal with because you know it's not real but you can't get to anything that is real.

Lynn mentioned seeing old photos of Marria standing with a set expression on her face, ordering her brother and sister to do something – her will to control and discipline others apparent at an early age. I remember the time she was looking after Bob, the OB's undisciplined dog. Because it was Bob's dog, and he seems to be her favourite son, she kept saying it was a lovely dog and she enjoyed having it around, but the whole time she was saying this, her face expressed only dismay and anger at how dreadful she secretly thought that dog really was. Lynn also told us something interesting about Oma. Oma lost a child. Marria, John and Narda had another sister, Enna. There are pictures of this child all over the walls of her bedroom so that the first thing Oma looks at when she wakes is this child.

Eric and Toni's reception was lovely. Toni's father talked about her athletic prowess at school. Eric was solicitous, his face radiant when he joined Toni for dancing. They played Motown music and it was so uplifting and fun. Toni is full of energy, and she kicked off her shoes and danced away. Fred and I did our Blake Carrington dance, which was basically a very stiff version of the Pogo, only with our arms extended so we could frown at our watches. We also did Church Lady dances. If everyone else can do the California Raisins we can do *Dynasty* and *Saturday Night Live*. Best wedding I've ever attended.

Aug. 4

Normal workday except for the bubbling undercurrent of knowing this is the day of my official book launch. I've been taking Joe's place for the month while he's on vacation and it's frantically busy – much busier than anyone had projected for this time of year. Interlibrary Loan department also swamped. Francisco is in Colombia visiting his family.

Elizabeth and Odette are also away, which means I have to deal with Valerie, who is kind but hyper. She turns the simplest procedure into a big deal; everything is a crisis. I was running around in my little copy service pen when a delivery man came in with a box of a dozen long-stemmed red roses – for me! The card said, “To the Queen of Fiction from the Prince of Islington.” Dearest Fred Merritt. All of the Copy Service regulars made a fuss over the flowers and now everyone at McLennan must know about the book. Fred (Van Driel) came and picked up the box. I kept 3 roses at work because they are so beautiful, and this really is an occasion.

The launch was basically a cocktail party held at Paragraphe bookstore. I sat with Concordia friends, Marie Gagne and Lucie Adams. Michèle and Susan Desaulniers came and bought books. Susan said some lovely things about the book. She couldn’t understand why everyone told her it was a book of children’s stories. I know she heard that from Sally and I wish Sally would get off that case. Susan loved the first story, “Monty” because it was rich and dense. Cathy and David came and went. If it hadn’t been for Lucie and Maria I doubt if I would have stayed very long either. Lila arrived. Great to see her. We embraced. She’s been in on this since the beginning. Mary Rose came, looking young, free, waiflike. We embraced, but I was whisked away and didn’t get to talk with her.

Coffee at Ben’s with Fred, Lucie and Marie. Lucie is working night shift in a psychiatric hospital. Marie is spunky. She was married to an alcoholic “for too long.” She talked about Al-Anon and how it influenced her life. She has been holding things together, raising her children, attending night classes. She is in the process of moving and is scheduled for an upcoming hysterectomy. I like and admire her. I am very lucky to be surrounded by so many spirited, courageous, indomitable women. Role models for me.

Fred and I then went to La Scala and joined Karen Haughian and company. She was surrounded by Englishmen, and kept ordering them to get up and change places. I was having an interesting conversation with someone from Ottawa and Fred was talking with someone about England and Scotland – then Karen made everyone move again. Neither Fred nor I connected with anyone again. I wish I could have spent the evening with friends.

Aug. 5

ASM meeting. New people, very different atmosphere. Axel Harvey there tonight. He went into Paragraph, saw my book and bought it off the shelf. Deena asked if there was an attraction between us. I said he unnerved me. André and Susan bought my book. Michel Simpson was there tonight. Deena is attracted to him. They've spent a lot of time together. She likes having attention from a man and likes his neat, tidy appearance. I am not so fond of him. His jokes are hokey and he makes odd disconcerting comments. He calls me "Scorpio" all the time. He knows I dislike him and he baits me. Tonight he said, "It's time you and I became friends." I am all for that. I have officially taken over newsletter duties but I don't know how I'm going to make out with the new executive. I miss the harmony and good humour of Deena, André, Lise, Lorissa and Susan.

**

Visited Mary Rose. Her mother is visiting from Alberta. Nice, down-to-earth, maternal. She bought a copy of "Polar Bear" to read on the return train - because she likes stories about people. Fun to hear them reminisce. Story of the time Mary Rose worked as a waitress, got angry at the boss, threw her hat on the floor and quit. Sounds a lot like that time I worked at the Continental Inn.

**

Concordia registration. Gary Geddes is my academic advisor. Although our paths have crossed many times and we know each other through Nu-Age, this is the first time we've actually met. Interesting talk with Linden Rogers in the grad office. It began when she told me I disconcerted her because of my resemblance to a young version of her mother "who, incidentally, was a very beautiful woman." Linden has had to work out a lot of things with her mother and any time I pop into the office I startle her, so I shouldn't take it personally.

We talked about cycles and the conversation became dreamy, the way talks with Mary Good at BHCL could. Circumstances, types of people who periodically enter our lives, all those songs on the radio she thought she'd never hear again yet are now endlessly recycled. We talked about the grad program and she said the department was unsupportive. The professors don't attend colleagues' readings. Linden doesn't read anyone's published work or go to launchings because she doesn't want to be drawn into politics.

She visited Montréal once and while she was walking down Sherbrooke St she had the feeling she would stay here – just as I did the first time I visited. I was also on Sherbrooke St at the time – during a transit strike. We talked a bit about reactions to “Polar Bear” and how I was sick of those stories long before the book ever came out. It was an extraordinary intimate conversation.

Aug. 15

Party at Dave and Claire's house in St-Sauveur. Overcast sky bringing out vivid purples, golds, oranges. Fred, Dave and I were the only ones who weren't francophone and I was afraid I'd be lost. Dave is becoming more and more part of Claire's world. I'm not sure how long they'd been together when we first met, but they're becoming more and more together as a couple. His French has also become very good. Claire broke the ice by sending us all outside to play a scavenger hunt game. After a while it didn't matter what language was being spoken. Everyone was having such a good time laughing, telling stories. I was pleasantly surprised by how much French I could understand and pick up. Met some interesting couples. Fred and I were the only couple officially married.

Met Sam who teaches English in the French system. We talked about learning and teaching second languages. Also talked to Jean-Paul about William Faulkner. Dave was warm and affectionate. He bought two books, for himself and Claire and for his brother. His brother has dyslexia and Dave is encouraging him to read. We feasted. Dave and Claire are like Yak and Kay for food fests. We danced outside and I discovered I can still do a mean “Time Warp.” So glad I came.

Aug. 24

Met Deena to deliver the newsletter flyer, the “pre-newsletter addendum” as I called it. She loved it. Heard all the FCA (Federation of Canadian Astrologers) gossip. Back-biting, lettres de cachet, photocopies of letters circulating across the country. She showed me a whiny, unprofessional, self-pitying letter from Anne Toth. Meanwhile, Donna Van Toen is very upset at having won a Saturn award, because in her mind, that award is given to people who are disciplined, good administered – and essentially unloved(!) So much for professionalism, neutrality, using the symbolism of the planets for good. Deena and I both have Moon in Capricorn and this dumping on Saturn is getting very tired. We both think it’s part of this more-spiritual-than-thou posture a lot of astrologers project. Disappointing and disillusioning. The entire concept of a cross-country group is threatened. Is this the fate of all groups – an implosion into envy, back-biting and emotional backwash coming from unexamined motives? I am so attracted to groups like this, but as soon as I find my way in I start feeling trapped and disillusioned.

Aug. 26

Ran into Norman and Rita at Expotech – the amazing holography exhibition at the waterfront. A hologram is a three dimensional photo made with the aid of a laser. The object is photographed (e.g., a rose), and bathed in the light of a laser beam. A second laser beam is bounced off the reflected light of the first beam, and the area where the two laser beams commingle. This is captured on film.

When the film is developed it looks like a swirl of light and dark lines. But as soon as the developed film is illuminated by another laser beam a 3-D image of the original object appears. If the hologram of the rose is cut in half and then illuminated by a laser, each half continues to contain the entire image of the rose. Even if the halves are divided over and over again, like cells, each cut of film with contain a smaller but intact version of the original image! Unlike conventional photography, every part of the hologram contains all of the information possessed by the whole image.

Some of the images were eerie. If you changed angle, stance, the image would completely disappear, or it would seem to project straight out of the wall. Unlike 3D movies you can't block out a reflection by blacking. You can't pass your hand through the hologram and have any effect on it. It seems to belong to a separate, parallel universe and nothing you can do here in this dimension has any effect on an artefact from another world.

Just after seeing this show I read an article in *The Village Voice* that speculated on a hypothesis that the universe itself is a projection, or hologram. Any categories are then artificial because all of nature is a seamless web with past, present and future all existing simultaneously. Which means that Picasso, Braque, Joyce, Stein etc were not only onto fragmented psychological reality but intuited even more about our universe!

We humans are actually "receivers" floating through a kaleidoscopic sea of frequency, and what we extract from this sea and transmogrify into physical reality is but one channel from many extracted from a superhologram. In a universe in which individual brains are actually indivisible portions of the created hologram, telepathy may merely be accessing the holographic level. Perhaps the reason why it seems there's a bedrock of consensus or status quo is because this is a reality formulated and ratified at the level of the human unconscious at which all minds are infinitely connected.

The mind is a labyrinth connected to every other mind. In a holographic universe there are no limits to the extent to which we can alter the fabric of reality. In a holographic universe, synchronicities make sense – everything in reality is a metaphor.

Aug. 29

Went to see *Raising Arizona* with Fred's Ski Alliance co-worker and friend Richard, and his girlfriend, Janet. After we left the cinema we ran into Karen Haughian, who was milling around with some intellectuals. Karen is a redhead with an elfin face, freckles, almond-coloured eyes. She has a disarming directness and charming mischievous smile. She can also be extremely self-conscious and talks at people instead of to them. She is always quite didactic with me, uses every opportunity to control, lecture, advise – anything but share a warm conversation.

All four of our little party felt she was really condescending to us. She made a big fuss over Fred's presence at the book launch. Was he not supposed to have been there? Then she polled us as to who among us actually *enjoyed* this movie or found it funny? All four of us admitted we both enjoyed it and laughed. Then Karen's friends stepped in to point out why they did not like the movie and why we shouldn't have laughed. Fred, Richard, Janet and I looked at each other. I made some comment about how we haven't learned how to walk upright yet. Then Richard said, "Well we've gotta be hopping along." We literally hopped off down the street as fast as we could. When we stopped to catch our breaths, I said to Richard, "I can't believe I just hopped off on my publisher." They hadn't realized Karen was my publisher and it became an even better joke.

Sept. 9

Another surprise at work. Ramona Randall from the CBC called. They want me to come down to the radio station to read one of my stories for a show called *Saturday Spotlight*. I was early and wandered around the Plateau for a while, nipping into two esoteric bookstores. I enjoyed the atmosphere today; crystal balls, gauzy palmistry curtains stitched with moon and stars. Incense, robes, scarves, baggies and vials of potions and herbs.

Walked into the CBC Complex on Dorchester like Dorothy entering the palace at Oz. Doors slid open, passages appeared out of nowhere, polished hallways extended as far as I could see. Everyone around me looked so chic. I had to sign in for a visitor pass and the receptionist reminded me of a maitre d'.

Ramona Randall met me. She was down-to-earth and led me past rooms where TV screens continuously flashed images – thousands of winking, blinking eyes all receiving and transmitting different invisible wavelengths. Passed a film-crew, actors, extras, directors, cameras. Exciting to enter the studio and see the giant reel-to-reel recorders. The technician sat back, reading a *Journal de Montréal*. When I arrived Richard Sommers was in the booth being interviewed by Barbara Black. He read some of his poetry from *Fawn Bones* and was smooth, poised and gracious in his responses to questions. He talked about being a game warden in the Townships.

I was briefed on how to read for the radio. Slowly and with exaggerated inflection, because the expression has to come across over the radio. The story Barbara Black, a book reviewer for *The Gazette*, selected for reading was “Middle Ground.” Mixed feelings about Barbara Black. On one hand she was personable and knew how to make relaxing conversation. On the other hand, her questions were rather silly and shallow revealing lack of familiarity with the book. Kind of like her reviews – and *The Gazette*, for that matter. She asked if the stories are autobiographical and what Crissy was working out in her own background in “Terra Incognita.” Nothing interesting or difficult so I wasn’t too nervous.

Sept. 11-12

First ASM lecture of the year. Because I am now doing the newsletter I can attend for free. Hardly anyone was at this lecture, which was a shame because it was one of the best I’ve ever heard. Jeff Green sat cross-legged on the table and just talked to us about Uranus. I could have closed my eyes and drifted off in this flow of articulate talk, combining and synthesizing planets through the signs, points of chart comparison, his own melange of insight and whimsy in creating images and keywords. He talks like his book. There was no spoon-feeding needy individuals. It was a time to listen, absorb and bring the insights to one’s own understanding. I sat with Susan Kelly. She has the most beatific smile sometimes. Beatific mixed with plutonium. She listens to the CBC and heard on the radio that I was going to be featured on Saturday Spotlight.

Left the lecture early so I could hear myself on the radio. Fred had his tape recording equipment on. Half an hour was given to Richard Somers. Then a golden-toned male voice came on and said, “And now Lesley Battler, reading a selection from *The Polar Bear Express*.” Though I didn’t enjoy the sound of my own voice, the whole idea of an official public “me” was amazing.

Sept. 14

First grad class with Terry Byrnes. The atmosphere was entirely different from the last class I took. An even split between men and women, for one thing. Everyone is approximately my age. Terry seems different as well. At first he read from a prepared talk in the cerebral relentless manner I remember from the old days, but then he relaxed and seemed far more comfortable as a professor. I guess he has that much more experience under his belt now and it shows.

Pleasant surprise. I ran into my favourite ex-boss, David Rowe in the Hall Building. He followed through on his thoughts of returning to school and doing an MA. He is taking a Spenser course this term. He was dressed in a suit, carrying a briefcase but still stands rather tilted and speaks in a droll devil-may-care manner. Danielle Fleury has left the FBDB to take a job with the NFB. Maria's job at the FBDB became permanent. Claudette Bristol, the woman I replaced on contract, went to Africa. I joked that the job was enough to drive anyone to another continent. The FBDB terminated the position or David would have asked me to return.

He said all he does these days is hand out references. "That's all I'm good for – hiring people so I can give them references when they leave." It is a very small library now; David, Lynda, Nick and Maria. So once again permanent employment has eluded me – missed it by that much. But I'm glad I didn't have to make that decision. Much as I like David, Maria and Nick and the thought of a salary and benefits, the job itself was living death and I love working at a university.

I also ran into Sally, who is taking another Canadian literature course. She wants to go into photography now. While I was talking to Sally, Heather came around the corner. We exchanged phone numbers and she bought a copy of *Polar Bear*.

After class, Fred picked me up and we went over to Yak and Kay's for dinner. A very comfortable evening, dinner, a movie on the VCR. Kayla breastfed Gavi. As usual we stayed much later than we intended. We looked at wedding photos Ya'acov and Fred had taken and then Ya'acov showed us the video of his and Kayla's wedding. Lively and fun, of course. Kayla sat in the middle of a circle looking like a terrified queen. A queen who has whipped the masses up into a frenzy and is terrified because she doesn't know how it happened or how to control it.

**

Long talk with Lucie Adams on the phone. She is taking a prose workshop with Terry Byrnes. She also finds him very cerebral, “way out there,” and the most well-read person she’s ever come across. She says he comes to life when you talk to him about fiction and use some of the terminology. Terry asked everyone in the class what they last read and she said, “the National Enquirer.” This class was dumbstruck, whereas Jennifer Clark would have laughed and given us some sort of lesson about everything being a source for writing. Lucie said she was going to say my book but decided that would be a little too incestuous. She also said she “can’t quite get over that angelic face of his.”

Sept. 19

Marsha and John in Montréal for the weekend, staying with John’s relatives on the West Island. Met Marsha at the museum. We went for coffee and the first thing she brought up in conversation was his relatives, how much she wants to please them, how humiliated she feels because she is living with, and not married, to John. We learned that she proposed to John and he eventually acquiesced for her sake. Fred and I looked at each other. Not sure what he was thinking but I felt we had drifted into waters we couldn’t navigate.

Marsha is bitter over the way Sharon has perceived and reacted toward her friends. I think some of this bitterness is justified because I feel Sharon judges and dismisses my friends as well. But sometimes Marsha brings it on herself. For example, Marsha told me horrible things Bill said and did when he visited us on Côte-St-Antoine. I became very angry with Bill, but why did she tell me these things? Also, Bill is a bitchy closeted gay man and says awful things about everyone and there’s no point in thinking about him.

We went to the Leonardo da Vinci exhibit. It featured his engineering achievements, replicas of mechanical devices, gew-gaws, sinister children’s toys. I was especially fascinated by the secular tone to Da Vinci’s writings about nature, long before the Enlightenment. Marsha and I wandered through the permanent collection and lingered a long time in the Impressionist section. After that, a carafe of wine in the cafeteria, sky darkening behind the elegant brick buildings surrounding the museum.

We talked about getting older, the big birthdays we're facing, our shared worry about mental illness. We're both shadowed by that – her by her father, me by my mother. Worry over whether or not we'll "beat the rap" is always there, even when our lives are full and satisfying. On the positive side, she loves her new job and the relationship with John is good.

Sept. 20

Spent a couple of hours in Fred's office working on the ASM newsletter. Met Marsha and we went to the Croissant de lune, then to Paragraphe and she bought two books, bless her heart. I don't know if she'll enjoy it. It seems that people close to me dislike it, but acquaintances really like it. But, the books is in the world now and I can't exactly tell people not to buy it.

**

New answering machine set up. Richard called with a funny message. Susan Kelly called to say I had done a wonderful job on the newsletter, that Fred and I are great and we're invited to her Thanksgiving dinner.

Last and best of all, Colin Browne called from Vancouver to say he is accepting "The Aleph" for the next issue of *Writing* magazine. His voice is airy and could pick up his quick crackling energy on the phone. It's been a long time since my thought processes have been this accelerated. This call was like being in the hot seat in class, only compacted into 15 minutes or so. He gave me a rundown on changes he'd like to see in the piece before publication. When I thanked him for calling me and giving me all this attention he said, "Just doing my job as an editor!" He said he would call again to discuss sending the piece out to him, as there is a postal strike. He also liked my Twilight Zone message and said he hoped he would be able to hear that message again. Then he laughed his wicked knowing chuckle.

Toni Scholefield also called to tell me she had lain in bed all morning and read *Polar Bear* straight through. She said she loved it. She doesn't read very much and was pleasantly surprised. She related to the awkwardness Crissy experienced in "Middle Grounds." The book is currently at Paragraphe, Double Hook, Argo, The Word and Coles.

Oct. 3

Time now to talk about Geoffrey, try to sort some feelings out. Geoffrey is from Uganda and works as a shelver on the fifth floor (literature section, which I can't avoid). He has been asking me out since June. I'm not attracted to him sexually but I like him as a person. We relate well and I've enjoyed some of our conversations. He sometimes reminds me of Fred Merritt. He asked me out for a drink and I declined, saying the set-up made me feel uncomfortable. He said he understood and told me about times he had been made to feel uncomfortable in his life. We had a good long talk and I hoped the matter was settled. He seemed understanding and sympathetic, and when he invited me again I accepted.

Geoffrey lives in a one-room student apartment. He made me a drink, very strong, a special brandy he bought for today. We had a good talk and I thought maybe I was wrong, maybe this wouldn't turn into a sex and power struggle. We talked about school, professors, Uganda. He has an MA, in Education.

Only at McGill do you have people with MAs working in the stacks or running isolated little departments like Copy Service or Audio-Visual. Geoffrey got his BA in Theology and is an ordained minister. He seemed to feel a great need to appear legitimate and he showed me his papers, his diploma and his passport. I noticed he had a menorah on his table and commented on it. He said he got it in Israel and showed me his passport with Uganda, Israel and other stamps. I wanted to hear his African music and he kept wanting to play Kenny Rogers and Chris de Burgh. It was at about this point when I started noticing how drunk I was. He started moving in on me and I realized I wasn't going to step so lightly out of this encounter. We danced. He was hot, he had a hard-on and I found myself wishing I was sexually attracted to him. I also berated myself for being stupid enough to go to his apartment. Why did I do that?

He closed his eyes and I alternated between responding and pulling away. My feelings were mixed; my messages were mixed. Then we ended up on the couch, and any feeling of enjoyment disappeared. He pinned me on the couch. I told him no, I liked out talks at McLennan Library but was not interested in him sexually. I wanted my husband, Fred, not Geoffrey. Geoffrey said that was good, “it will make good sex to think about Fred while doing it to me.” He asked what nationality Fred is and when I told him Dutch, Geoffrey said, “Oh good. The Dutch don’t shoot.” He became more insistent; I became more resistant. He stopped. I left and called Fred.

Fred and I went on to Sally’s birthday party, which was held at Cathy’s apartment. Cathy took one look at me and asked what was wrong. I told her I could have been raped. Cathy took me to the police station to file charges against him. Once there, I had second, third, fourth thoughts. I didn’t think charging G was the right thing to do. I shouldn’t have gone in the first place and I should never have told Cathy that I could have been raped. He stopped. The questions on the form had nothing to do with the situation. Up until being pinned on the couch I had enjoyed myself. I enjoyed the dancing and conversation. I should never have accepted alcohol. I should never have gone there at all. There was never any doubt about what he wanted from me. He did not keep any of this hidden. Cathy crusaded for me and now I feel weak, deceptive and as if I took advantage of her goodwill.

**

Talked to Cathy on the phone. She has been supportive and strong, telling me everything she knows about sexual assault and legal implications. She is going to accompany me to the Simone de Beauvoir Institute so I can talk it out to someone, tell them the whole story. To add to the complex feelings, if I press charges on Geoffrey, a black man from Uganda, the consequences will be so much worse for him than others. There is nothing he did that was worse than any of these elite white guys at Queen’s. I knew what he wanted and I chose to go anyway. Cathy is right, though, I need to work this through.

**

Colin called again. This time we had a personal talk and made arrangements to send “The Aleph” by courier. I could hear Susannah in the background. It’s her 9-month birthday. Colin said, “I may just be sounding like a proud dad but she’s really nice, she’s very merry.” I mentioned some of the people I still see and he said it was a terrific group. He has just completed his film and will be taking it across the country. He may have a date in Montréal in December or January. *Abraham* is also coming out soon – at last – and he’s sending me a copy!

I mentioned see Kathy Acker with Mary Fowke, how amazing I found her work but how ungracious she was toward an audience who was really enthusiastic about seeing her. I also mentioned how insulated she was by her coterie, who really did come across like a goon squad. We talked about writers who stop producing their best work after they become too shielded by a clique. He said some of her early work was amazing. Colin heard from Gary Geddes that *Polar Bear* might go into a second edition and he told me I have what it takes and he’s happy to hear I’m “writing and flourishing.” Lovely uplifting Colinish talk. It made the whole Geoffrey incident seem like a dark blurred dream.

Oct. 5

Met Cathy, early in the morning. We walked over to the Simone de Beauvoir Institute. A bright blue and gold day. Cathy said it was the kind of day that reminded her of being in Germany. She loves the drama of stormy days in Bavaria. Our conversation leaped from topic to topic on the way over. I like Cathy’s spontaneity and unpredictability. The women I talked to at the Institute were concerned and supportive. The receptionist connected me with a counsellor from CLSC Metro and I summarized the story over the phone. I felt inhibited talking on the phone to someone with the receptionist right there and wished I could sit in a dark booth and confess. My clothes still smell of Geoffrey and last night I dreamed he was about to crush me.

The people at Simone de Beauvoir have been supportive and frank. Nothing is my fault, it was him and the society that creates him and ignores the victim. Yet I don't feel I'm a victim. I felt trapped and threatened but I honestly never should have gone there, never should have brandy, never should have danced with him. Most importantly, he stopped when I insisted. All of the support and sympathy makes me feel as if I'm the one who is deceitful, that I just want attention. When I expressed some of my misgivings like my not filing a police report, I was told that every woman feels the same feelings. So then, are my feelings of misgiving the usual male-dominated cultural self-doubt that women express?

I actually feel pressure to report because, as Cathy says, more women drop charges and choose to remain silent than speak out and defend their human rights. I don't like the idea of being yet another woman helping the issue stay closeted. My heart and instinct tell me that this situation is different, though, and I'm not going to report it to the police. Yet another thought: would I report this if he were a white guy?

**

Later today ... met Sally and Cathy after our respective classes. Went to the Limelight for coffee and dessert. We didn't bring up the subject of Geoffrey or the Institute, and I was extremely happy to not talk about it. Instead, I played straight man to the Sally-Cathy duo. They often seem like a lesbian couple. I have never had that intimate a relationship with a female friend. It was taboo between Val and me. Val was repelled by any hint of lesbianism. Cathy and Sally told stories about dancing slow dances together in clubs. Last year they both shared a class and Sally would come in and play with Cathy's hair.

At the Limelight, Sally started telling a story about her mother and her mother's boyfriend. As usual with Sally, it was like walking into the middle of a dream where everything is grainy and shifting all around you. Intense and fraught without knowing the origins of any of it. She talked about how humiliated she was when her mother and the boyfriend used to take Sally to classy restaurants in Moncton. The boyfriend would wear a shoulder-length wig and platform shoes. He and her mother would act like boors and embarrass Sally. This story came out of nowhere with no apparent trigger, and Cathy teased her. "That's right Sally Elizabeth, just come in, sit down and tell us some traumatic story from the past, out of the blue."

After I gave them copies of the book, Sally announced that she's going to law school. I can see this, especially after reading me my rights over the phone yesterday. Then the conversation became very personal and strange. Cathy told Sally she was afraid for her. She herself is gearing up for law school and she's afraid Sally is sinking into a rut with Grant and her babysitting job. It bothers Cathy to have to tell people her best friend is a babysitter. Then Cathy said there's been a decline in Sally. Sally agreed and said that she is afraid of losing her grip on reality and that Cathy is going to outgrow her. Cathy urged Sally to finish her BA. Sally is seriously in debt though, even with Grant's help. She then told Cathy she wasn't going to let Grant or anything else come between their friendship.

Sally wants to switch from writing and publishing into photography, probably under Grant's influence. My gut feeling is still that Sally would be good in the publishing world. She knows how to make friends. She is loyal, she would promote work she likes – and new work. She was appalled by Nu-Age's poring over old Concordian MA manuscripts and ignoring new ones they were receiving.

There's a lot to Sally that people don't see. If she would develop her stories so they follow the way she speaks and tells stories, who would have a unique almost wholly internal vision where dialogue and narrative are melded, where there is no beginning or ending and you are left a little dislocated, floating in a suspended state. The gender-bending is also fascinating and goes along with this borderless world. I wish she would develop her unique voice.

Oct. 7

Went to see Alain Resnais's *Providence*. The film showed many of the aspects Colin talked about in Writing, in his class and over the telephone to me. Here it was on screen and I could see what was happening – where the film was at its most powerful, where it slacked off, more unsuccessful transitions or befuddling scenes. I thought the film was most powerful when the images rapidly shifted from memory to dream. In this film, Resnais portrays God as a dying writer, who recalls people from his past – recreating them as he was recalling.

There was a subconscious element in the film; characters sifted through underbrush. Forces of nature, and of the human body playing off the hyper-consciousness, repression and intellectualizing of the characters in their cavernous settings. Chandeliers hang like stalactites, lights glow as if embedded in rock crystal. Everything is muted and subterranean in these labyrinths. Light soft, opaline, the world reflected on the surface of water. Time, space and memory meld like land, water and sky.

Oct. 9-11

My Thanksgiving weekend was full! First, on the 9th, Marsha and John spent the night here enroute to Vermont – the annual camping trip and feast at What’s Your Beef. We had dinner at Amelio’s a jolly McGill student pizza place. It was a great evening of conversation and wine. Maybe because John was with us we didn’t sink under talk of relatives and marriage. Marsha said she liked *Polar Bear* and said some insightful things about it. She related strongly to some of the descriptions and images, which pleased me because most people talk about the high school and sibling play. (Mary Rose read one of the stories and was surprised I noticed so much. She said the observations were so sharp they didn’t seem like me. One thing is certain, I have no gift for close, supportive friendships.)

**

Fred and I went to Francisco’s apartment for Thanksgiving dinner party. He lives in a co-op in an old building on Clark. It felt like we were approaching a haunted house on Halloween night; rain-soaked streets, objects appearing like the scarab in the Moon Tarot card. Met Krystina, Francisco’s girlfriend. She didn’t know or care who we were – it was enough to say we were friends of Francisco. She welcomed us warmly and we joined people clustered in the dining room. The apartment was full of books. It turns out that Francisco used to own an antiquarian bookstore and he kept the books after he sold the store.

He wafted around, making sure everyone was content. He has lofty but affectionate manner. He brought out great tureens of soup, lamb stew and an enormous turkey, which may have been the best I've ever had. He runs a catering business on the side. The party continued until 4 am, until neighbours complained and Francisco cut the electricity, which induced most people to leave.

**

Went to Rita and Norman's Sukkot party. They put on a wonderful show. The card tables set up on their porch groaned under the weight of all the food. Pine branches criss-crossed to form a Sukkot roof with twinkling lights. It really did make me think of being in a temporary shelter with stars gleaming in the sky above. It also made me think of *The Little Prince*. The Bauer wise-guy humour came out in their pumpkin, which was carved as a Magen David. Mr Bauer was pleased and proud of the Sukkot, which must have really pleased Rita. Her father's approval is very important to her; they are both craftspeople and perfectionists. The whole family has inherited Mr Bauer's mischievous sense of humour.

Mr and Mrs Bauer came with Y and K's friend Stephen. Another interesting talk with Stephen while we were wandering through the backyard looking at the garden and all the fences and alleys. We talked about how much we both love alleys, tenements and the area around St-Laurent. Stephen is reading *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. He is the first person I have met who has ever heard of that book. I loved it as a child. He lost his serious demeanor. A light came into his eyes and he spoke wistfully, sensitively about the characters in the book. I was delighted to talk about this book. Stephen reminds me of an orphan with his intensity and outsider quality. He is also intelligent and sensitive and we have often ended up in surprising conversations. He seems to have adopted the Bauers as his own family – as perhaps Fred and I have also done.

Fred and I left early and went on to Susan Kelly's Thanksgiving party. Fred stayed at Susan's for a couple of hours, then he went to Ya'acov's Sukkot and I spent the evening at Susan's. At first it was fun. I met Leslie, another library person completing her MLIS. Lise Simard was there and conversation flows between us. Then I met Howard Tessler, who has copies of the four Nu-Age books. He works in the AV department at Redpath.

We talked about working at McGill, the hierarchy, the division between librarians and assistants and how the librarians seem to think they are military commanders. The special librarians are much more down-to-earth about their place in the universe. Howard knows Odette and Joe Swift. Unfortunately he read my book and was quite dismissive. He thought it was a pale imitation of Alice Munro.

The linked story structure (which was Sally's idea, dating from Colin's class) does resemble Munro, but I don't think our voices, or what we are trying to do are similar. She seems to be working a much larger, more sweeping canvas. I wish I wasn't stuck with being compared to Alice Munro, especially since I never gave her work a thought while writing my stories and she's not a great influence on me in general. But I do get why people are doing that.

Carolyn Springer came to Susan's party and we had a good talk. She is celebrating her first year anniversary of leaving Ville Marie Social Services and she looks so much lighter, more buoyant. She is doing "new age" counselling on her own; seminars and talks on nutrition, diet, astrology, Tarot and self-development at Collège Victorin.

After a while though, Carolyn seemed a bit too triumphant, smiling a bit too much, like a newly converted Christian. This is probably just the phase people seem to go through when they think they've found their life calling. Interesting talk about childhood. Carolyn's was old-fashioned and austere. Now she wears bright colours, dresses in a free way, goes barefoot, all things she was not allowed to do when young. I am happy for her and am sure she is an excellent counsellor with her blend of sympathy, common sense and constructive suggestions. I wish more people like her entered "new age" practices.

The party crumbled shortly after many people were drawn into a stupid discussion about power led by a granite-jawed Burger King Machiavelli. Susan's best friend, Ariel Harper, failed to interest the visiting astrologer and that group left. The power conversation became uglier and Carolyn left. The party fell apart the way Cathy and Sally's gatherings do, as if at some random time in the night roadies walk in, dismantle all the props and walk off the set with them.

Oct. 14

Went to see *Un zoo de nuit*. It is at least two movies in one; a French flic movie set here in Montréal with the kind of rich photography you see in movies from France. The other movie is a dream. The story of the son's love of the father, dream scenes of escaping the city. A beautiful scene where Marcel washes his father's feet, takes off his clothes, lies beside his father who is looking bewildered and sad. Roger Le Bel was excellent as the father, a blend of humour and pathos. The film is full of sacrifice symbols; sacrifice of the elephant at the zoo in a dream sequence, a Virgin Mary figurine is pulled out at the restaurant. Marcel is in crucifixion position when he is raped in Bordeaux jail. All scenes infused with a dry humour.

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Off to Vermont, camped at Mount Mansfield. We went to Lake of the Clouds, a hidden lake surrounded by trees and a bog that almost fooled us into believing it was the lake. It was only when I stopped to go to the bathroom I found a path leading up to a ledge and then found the real Lake of the Clouds.

Oct. 31

Fun morning shipping for Halloween. I decided to be a beatnik and Fred a pretentious movie director. Very easy costumes to create. For me it was simply a matter of exaggerating my regular style. Fred always ends up playing these cheesy obnoxious characters. Last year he was Scoop Craven. This year he's posturing with a megaphone and clapping his hands briskly. "People, people, work with me!" After we dressed we swooped into Astral. Ian Basso and Lina were there. Ian loved the Jack Kerouac book I had clipped to my belt. Fred and I then went on to le Cinema Papineau to see *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, as part of the new cinema and video festival.

This movie takes place in Thatcher's Britain, portrayed as a violent, desolate war-time landscape. Relationships between the characters segued in fragments between the turmoil and conflict of the outside world. One scene in which Rosie slips out in the night shadows in a vintage suit strongly evoked a war-time feeling. A band popped at unexpected moments, undulating through disparate scenes throughout the movie. Conflict between Sammy and Rosie, Sammy and his father with the shady political past, the father and his ghost, the camp under the bridge and the real estate developers.

Disturbing scene when the bulldozers disperse the camp and destroy the art work. All these levels of conflict occurring at once, separate, fragmented yet telling the story of a politically disenfranchised society in the 1980s. Conflict was the outer form of the movie, and also all of its interior parts, which acted like cogs moving the big wheel.

On to Cathy's. Met Cathy, Sally and Grant. Cathy's hair was teased and she was dressed in black, very Rocky Horror, and she looked sensational. Sally was dressed as Little Red Riding Hood. So many sides to Sally; pleasant, undisciplined, tomboy, executive and a stubborn bedrock conservative side. Also that interesting gender-bending. Sally baked a birthday cake for me and they sang happy birthday. Michèle arrived, dressed as Carmen, looking beautiful in a peasant blouse and flowing skirt. We went to a Concordia dance. Sally, Cathy, Michèle and I danced on top of a table, then Cathy and Sally slow-danced together. Michèle seemed alone and isolated throughout the evening, coming alive only when Cathy took her in hand. She and Sally are very reserved with each other. An interesting threesome.

Nov. 5

Heard Gail Scott read from her marvellous novel, *Heroine*. She was more vulnerable and nervous than I expected. Also heard Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, translator and member of a group of writers known as "Écriture féminine." She has also published in *Writing* magazine. Also saw Steven Frank and we caught up on the news. It was the best reading I've attended. No one could break the spell, not even Gail Scott herself, who tried to bait the audience by asking if anyone was a Marxist. But no one replied; we were all overcome.

Met Fred and went to dinner at L'Hotellerie with Dave and Claire. Felt like well-dressed young men and women about town, doing the right things in the right places. We talked about the rights things too, the play "Cats," which we four had recently seen together. We also talked about Rene Lévesque, who has recently died. We were all sincerely sorry to hear the news.

Claire is working at a school in Côte St-Luc, helping to set curriculum. She said most of the students are immigrants who are not interested in learning French or investing anything in Québec. They want to learn English and leave for Ontario. This creates a lot of tension on both sides. I mentioned how often I hear the same kind of thing at Concordia and how temporary most of my Montréal friendships feel. It started to snow on our way out of l'Hotellerie. We were no longer just well-respected people about town, the snow brought us together as companions.

Nov. 8

Went to hear a Jeff Green video at Lorisa's apartment. I really think "salons," local speakers and video afternoons is the direction the ASM should go in. No one can afford the expensive speakers and venues. I also feel spending money on big names causes higher admission prices and creates a gulf between the haves and have-nots in the Association. Of course, I'm speaking as one of the have-nots.

I mentioned to Deena about how a lot of astrologers think they are the only people who feel undervalued and "dumped on" by society when artists and creative people of any type have just as difficult a time. Deena said that astrologers have an "us vs them" mentality. They see the world divided between themselves and business people, and don't make any distinctions or acknowledge any nuances. I love talking with Deena.

Met Neera, a forceful Scorpio-Leo combination who told some of us about a near-incestuous feeling she had about her father, which actually caused her to grow blind when she was fourteen years-old. Lorisa's soft penetrating energy helped Neera understand how it showed up in her chart. It was really good, skillful astro-psychology in practice.

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Good interview in a publication called *Above and Below*, which Deena lent me as a possible subscription for the library. In the interview Dutch astrologer Karen Hamaker-Zondag said, “Take care that you have some friends who are not involved in astrology. That way you can remain normal. Because when you are with only people who do astrology, it’s so easy to get into the power conflict. You think that you’re very different. It’s the same thing Guggenbuhl-Craig says about psychiatrists who have friends only in psychiatry. They only discuss the things they come across in their work. They think they are very special, but actually can’t help anyone any more because they’ve gotten lost in the art. The same is true for astrologers.

“I don’t care if other people I meet reject astrology or not. ... I always say, I don’t believe in it either – I see it works. I think that being in a position of confidence about the things that you are doing and like doing, that you don’t need to be reinforced by people doing the same thing in the outside world. Keep your feet firmly on the ground. See yourself first as a human being. And stay humble. You are one of the many.”

I think the exact same thing applies to writers.

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Received a copy of *Abraham* in the mail from Colin Browne. He signed it:

“For Lesley -
Aleph-seeker too.
Colin”

Nov. 24

Lucie Adams, Heather Johnston-Main and I met at Matt Palmer’s new place to read and discuss our poetry. Matt is back in town, living in an enormous downtown apartment. He heard me on the CBC and we talked about the book for a while. Everyone in the room has Terry Byrnes as a teacher this year and we talked about him. In Lucie’s fiction class, she called someone’s protagonist a “yellow-bellied sap-sucker,” she she said that Terry “in that way he has,” just looked at her and said, “This criticism is becoming ornithological.” Lucie said she was left speechless – “for probably the first time in my life.”

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On my way to pick up photocopies from Terry Byrnes's mailbox I ran into Susan Usher in the CASE office. I sank into the couch and we talked – until I realized my lunch hour was long over. There was a tiny blurb about *Polar Bear* written by a *Gazette* reviewer. The reviewer mentioned my age three times. He also said the stories were not strong enough to stand individually and are redeemed only by my “sprightly” style of writing. Susan and Karen are both very unhappy about it. I just want to crawl under the covers and disappear. I have a feeling I should switch to the MLIS.

**

Ran into Cathy and David at the Faubourg. They were sitting at a table examining contact sheets. The photos were all of Cathy. David was annoyed with Cathy because he thought she was being self-centered. Cathy was annoyed with David because he couldn't see that she would be a perfect model for a student magazine. There were several photos of her posed in a Concordia sweatshirt, looking wholesome and healthy – vitally alive. I thought she was right, the photos were perfect. Their world is incestuous, though: Cathy, Sally, David, Michèle. When I go out with them I feel as if I have wandered into a dark room where is nothing in it but mirrors reflecting their images back and forth.

Cathy, Sally and Michèle almost seem like some sort of obsessive love triangle to me, trapped within themselves. As for me, I have managed to make myself extremely busy, dividing my time between McLennan and Nursing-Social Work libraries, night classes at Concordia and doing the tape club and newsletter for the ASM. But, I should not forget how many fraught threesomes I have been caught in, which may be why I am steering clear of this bog land.

Dec. 19

ASM Christmas party held at Susan Kelly's. Mary Rose, Morrie and I went together, trying to make bus connections, get off at the right stops before we killed each other. Morrie had very set ideas on where we should go and would not take my advice even though I have been to Susan's many times. He was impervious to anyone's suggestions. It would have been easier to cross the Andes by frog.

Susan's apartment was warm, lovely blues and jazz music playing. At one point I joined Mary Rose who was arguing with Axel Harvey over children and education. MR was rhapsodizing over the talents and awareness of her son Eli and his friends, how they are stifled by the educational system. Axel, as detached and bullish as usual, countered with his belief that education must be ordered and hierarchical. All aesthetic ideals, all beauty is hierarchical, it's nature's way, the law of the universe, and so on. I tried to disengage but Axel said, "I hate it when people do that – take a side and then not follow it up.."

I felt honour-bound to continue although I am terrible in arguments or debates. I am not a quick-talker and can't pull my thoughts together enough to be effective. All I do is sputter. This is more why I don't engage. But I felt I should defend Mary Rose, so I sat down with them and debated the notion of hierarchy. I said that order and hierarchy are only two paths that nature takes. What about the sheer extravagance of life, intricacies that don't exist for any other reason to be intricate? What about networks of roots? But as usual I was soon reduced to gibbering. Axel then turned around and said we were arguing the same point, differing only in semantics. I was tempted to tell him I hate it when people co-opt your side of an argument. Instead, Axel and I kissed and made up and I told him I had enjoyed talking to him about something other than the tape club.

**

Met up with Scott Lawrence in the Hall Building. We sat and talked for a while about the program. I said I was learning a lot but most of the time I just feel so bloody stupid. Scott said I have an ability he really envied and just can't do, and that is the ability to write from instinct. He labours over his writing, planning each section, writing, rewriting that section until it is right. He said I reminded him of Sandy Wing, who had similar issues with the program.

Dec. 22

Nursing/Social Work party. Wendy Patrick gave us all Belgian chocolates to thank us for our hard work. Odette met me and a group of us went to Moby Dick's, a pick-up place in Maison Alcan. Ailsa, Odette, Aileen, Riley, Jane Jackel and I formed quite a group. Odette and I walked over together, griping about our work at McLennan Library, and our ILL manager, Valerie Mayman. Valerie is insensitive at times, suffers from tunnel vision and good-little-girl trying to get to the head of the class syndrome. Francisco is the favourite while Odette feels she is treated like a servant. Valerie has actually called Odette at home on a Saturday night about work. I told her McLennan Library thinks its the centre of the universe and the librarians act as if they're trying to govern a country during wartime. Their war is really with the rigidly hierarchical structure, the low esteem for their professional credentials and accomplishments. This is passed right on down to us, the assistants.

Valerie recently suggested that the ILL department move to where copy service is – where there are no windows or ventilation. Odette sees that as Valerie's disrespect for her employees. I said I think Valerie has a good heart but she is so immersed in her work, so anxious and hyper she doesn't notice things like windows or food – and that is something we employees have to tell her about.

Arrived at Moby Dick's, a slice as usual. Aileen and Ailsa mocked the place with a bawdy, raunchy humour reminding me of Val. Ailsa smiled and beckoned men over to the table. When they sat down, she and Aileen would ask them questions like, "Are you dominant in bed?"

Good talk with Aileen about *Sammy and Rosie* (which she also loved) and people at McLennan. She likes Suzy Slavin but says Suzy is completely single-minded about her work and professional status. She doesn't have much of a life outside her job and won't become involved with a man without the requisite degrees and career. Aileen thinks Mary Mason in no-nonsense and down-to-earth. We agreed on Valerie's good points. Then a man sat down to flirt with us and Ailsa drew us all into a hilarious soap opera and changed our names. I was Brenda. Aileen and Riley were husband and wife, but Riley after having an affair with me for the past two years, was now having an affair with the Jane Jackel character. It was hilarious and reminded me of "Sammy and Rosie."

Eventually the group disbanded and I called Fred. While waiting for him I ended up in a deep conversation with Riley and Jane Jackel. It started when one of us said how Christmas was depressing and we all admitted we weren't looking forward to it. JJ said she couldn't go home because she couldn't forgive her mother. Riley told us his father had once held a gun to Riley's temple! But as years passed, Riley learned to forgive him and he said, "The best thing to do is just go home and love them – even if it's hopeless, just love."

"But I can't," Jane said. "I can't even talk to my mother. I can't forgive her for the things she did to me."

Both such powerful voices, and both I completely understand on a deep level. The end of another frivolous evening.

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Talk with Pat Taylor. She is a Jungian psychologist; she is also an anarchist chemist who, as popular legend has it, was fired from her company for making bombs in the lab. First we talked about blowing things up and then about lack of faith – endemic to Saturn in Sagittarius, a placement we share. Pat really listens, she doesn't utter a sound until you finish talking and her responses are deep and thoughtful. She's very sensitive and in touch with the intuitive, the emotional and the dream world. She thinks my 12th house emphasis is wonderful and we talked about knowledge that isn't generated by the brain but is known, felt, coming from an inner source you can't even describe.

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Christmas in Barrie not as bad as I feared. Weather was mild and we drove the back roads to Orillia and slept in the back of the car. A beautiful night. I thought of the talk with Jane and Riley; Jane's burden, Riley's forgiveness and love. And then I felt something lift in me. My spirit started to soar. I realized I am not under anyone's power any more. My life is not dependent on my mother. She has her own path to follow and that path is not mine. We are not intertwined, there is no fate. She is just a human being and I have no cause to judge. This might be a bit of a duh revelation but I can't believe this feeling of lightness, forgiveness and mercy.

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Drove to Detroit to visit Fred's cousins. His cousin Carol wrote him a month or so ago, stating as if in a press release, that her husband Don, has been having a long-time affair and wants out of the marriage. This is a big deal for evangelical christians. We had spoken to her last summer and she talked about seeing a counsellor and declared she and Don would be married for life. She tried to initiate a reconciliation but it didn't work out. Don was simply not interested enough to make it work. Fred and I decided to visit her and his Aunt Lynn.

They greeted us warmly. Carol, Fred and I talked a long time about the separation, divorce, Carol's son PJ's reaction. She said she was trying to satisfy everyone's needs without expressing any of her own, a problem endemic to her family, and to doctors. This played right into Don's hands because he is emotionally crippled and incapable of satisfying anyone else's needs. The marriage broke down after she started expressing her needs. She said she admired me because I am not a "rescuing wife."

She was the one who kept the lines of communication open between Don and his parents. She asked if I did the same for Fred and I said no, Fred's relationships are his own affair. If he quarrels with his mother he deals with it. Carol said she admired me for having that strength. Well, his family doesn't accept or like me - there's nothing in it for me to act as mediator. It's hard for me to be around Carol without feeling overwhelmed, negated. She has a strong presence, which a lot of people seem to find charismatic.

She also has the Van der Harst/Van Driel obsession with step-by-step logic. She kept repeating, "What goes up must come down." Seems to be a verbal tic like Cathy Gray's repetition of "Do you know what I mean?" Carol can't admit that she doesn't know everything. Fred and I both winced when she stated opinions on history or literature. Fred, and his entire branch of the family are all like that. If they don't know something they bluff. After a while you realize they're just blowing smoke and it's hard to believe anything they say.

I'm much more comfortable with Lynn. She has Carol's psychological acumen but not her territorialism or tribalism. I think Lynn often feels shut out by her own daughter, who makes the Van der Harsts seem like a bloc. Lynn doesn't make me feel like an outsider and often we share a private joke or alliance. Her repetitive phrase is "that's okay." Carol said the family was dysfunctional and Lynn very coolly talked about it without becoming defensive or angry. She doesn't back away from Carol's strong terminology.

Unaccustomed snowstorm in Detroit. Tour of city with Carol and her brother Pete. Toured the city on the "people-mover" a brand new mono-rail. The Detroit River, dividing Detroit and Windsor was slate-grey, chill, forbidding. Some gorgeous elegant buildings. This is a truly elegant city with a wonderful art deco theatre. The inner city has suffered a devastating blow with all the money leaving for the suburbs, especially after the 1967 riots. Many abandoned office towers. Also so many cars left on the shoulders of the expressway. Went to Belle Isle. An expanse of white in more ways than one. Pete and Carol both good-humoured and easy as we went through a greenhouse and an aquarium. Pete's wife, Heather did not come. They are having bad times and Peter has admitted to Carol that he wants out of his marriage.

Visit with Debbie and Mike. It was a good time to come for we saw them just before their move to California. We visited them at their little frame house, sat on card table chairs, drank some wine, surrounded by packed boxes. Debbie doesn't want to move, leave her family, everything she has ever known, behind. Mike talked about the company that is sending him to California.

Debbie continually shifted between coolness and emotion. Besides Lynn, I find Debbie the most interesting one in the family with her quick tongue and intelligence. Both Lynn and Carol seem to dismiss Debbie as the family joe, poor Deb who can't control her house and kids, can't get organized, can't handle money. But I think she's inherited her mother's intelligence, Carol being slower and more step-by-step like the Van der Harsts. Deb is more interesting, the good Christian homemaker with the sharp tongue and flashes of irreverence.